

The Lost Cause

by web of light

Category: StarTrek: Voyager

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-11 18:22:50

Updated: 2016-04-11 18:22:50

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:46:29

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,009

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Added Moment post Caretaker. Drastic measures lead to crew unity. Proto Chakotay/Janeway

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Chakotay took a step back, his phaser pointed toward them.

"I'm sorry Captain but this is how it has to be. There was a reason we left Starfleet. The reason we are here because of Starfleet. We renounced Starfleet principles and have no intentions of living by them now. What we must do now is get home. You will be comfortable here, more comfortable than on Voyager's brig. If we get home in a decent amount of time and if it is feasible we will find a way to rescue you but for right now this is good bye. Voyager. One to beam!"

His hand went toward his combadge. He was going to beam the rest of the Starfleet Crew down to the planet surface but Tom rushed Chakotay knocking him over. He pulled off his combadge and grabbed his phaser stunning the Maquis leader. It was all over in a few seconds. He beamed aboard in Chakotay's place. He had the presence of mind to stun the Maquis standing at the transport station. In less than a minute he removed the guard's combadge and beamed him to the planet surface and beamed Captain Janeway up. She didn't appear to be the least bit surprised that Tom had the determination and inner strength to do what he had just done.

"Good job Mr. Paris. Where are our people?"

"In Cargo Bay One."

It took less than thirty minutes. Paris and Janeway were able to silently take down all the guards. They broke into a weapons locker and armed their people. There were firefights in the corridors and in short order all the Maquis were in the Cargo Bay. With a few words they were beamed down to the surface to join the unconscious Chakotay.

He woke up, his head hurting, surrounded by the Maquis.

"What...happened?" He asked.

"What does it look like?" Torres said. Her eyes were blazing. "The plan backfired. Paris and Janeway managed to get back on the ship."

"Paris. Rushed me. I thought he wasâ€¦!"

She didn't listen. She walked away from him and yelled. She started throwing things. Rocks and sticks not caring where they landed. It was all Seska and the others could do to calm her down.

"So what do we do now?" Dalby asked.

Chakotay stood up. The planet was a pleasant place. Temperate climate, lush vegetation. Uninhabited. The place where the Starfleet crew were going to live out their lives. Now it was going to be the home of the Maquis.

"I suppose we should look for shelter. There are some caves not far from here. Then we can decide on what to do next."

"There is no 'next'," B'Elanna said. "This is our life. Because YOU thought it would be a good idea to take over the ship and now because of YOUR stupid decision we're stuck here."

"B'Elanna I'm sorry. You know this isn't how it was supposed to happen."

"You're as bad as Janeway. Making decisions for all of us!" She said. Chakotay had seen her angry. He had seen her hurl Klingon curses at other people but never at him. Never. He was surprised as how much that hurt. He watched the young woman storm off. Seska hesitated for a moment before going after her."

"You know she didn't mean it. She'll be alright when she calms down," she said.

No one else said anything but he could see their thoughts. "As bad as Janeway."

Captain Janeway settled into her chair. Lt. Tuvok, Tom Paris and Ensign Kim were seated around the briefing room table. It was a rather strange group. Two former Maquis and a green Ensign who was her only other Senior Officer with the exception of Lt. Carey who was now busy working on repairs. Still if he was to be in charge of OPS he needed to be included in the decision making process. Tom Paris was another matter. His behavior on Ocampo and what he had done to remove the Maquis from the ship had gained him valuable points in her eyes. She had been toying with an idea of reinstating his commission but was hesitant given his prison record. She was now determined to go through with it but that would come later after this present crisis was settled.

"So how long do we let them sit there and stew?" Tom asked.

"I was thinking a couple of days," The Captain said. "Until we can find a way to address this problem. Like it or not, we need them. We can't run this ship with what's left of the Starfleet crew and I'm not going to abandon them."

"We need them as cooperative members of the crew, Captain. Not as antagonistic people impressed into service against their will," said Tuvok. "We could convert one of the cargo bays into a brig. As time passes we can release the more cooperative ones to the duty stations for which they are most suitable."

"Prison? I know that's an option but I would really like to avoid that if possible," The Captain said.

"The question is what can we do to 'help' them be more cooperative," Ensign Kim asked..

"Part of me says leave them there but I admit I'm saying that for purely selfish reasons. We have already picked up two passengers. I'm sure we will be able to find some more who might be willing to help us," Tom said. "And to be honest, I'm not really on board with the idea of putting anyone in 'prison', not even the Maquis."

"There are no alien ships of any kind within range Mr. Paris," Tuvok said. "And while leaving the Maquis behind might make your life easier let me just say that the needs of the manyâ€¦"

"I know. I'm the one. How do we know if we let them back on board and this might now happen again?" Tom asked.

"We could save their lives," Harry said. "Bad guys. A predator. Holographic guys...we save them from certain deathâ€¦"

"You mean some sort of benevolent subterfuge? Mr. Paris and I are acquainted with the Maquis having spent some time in their company. They are not, 'stupid'. Having had to commit such acts themselves I believe they would soon see through such machinations," Tuvok said.

"You are right of course and now that I think of it...too much work," Harry said.

"And the fact that they would 'owe' us might not help. It might make them more resentful," the Captain said. Walking toward the portal she stood there for a moment staring at the stars.

"Some of them are former Starfleet. I understand why some of them did what they did but I can't believe they would abandon the idea of exploration. To deny them that would seemâ€¦cruel."

"They were more than willing to deny that to us," Tom pointed out.

"True" she admitted. "But I'm willing to take that risk. I am hoping that given time to think they will realize that any enmity between the Maquis and Starfleet does not matter in the Delta Quadrant. I want you to keep continuous scans on Chakotay. When he is isolated from the rest I'm going to beam down and talk to him. I have an idea. Come with me if you must Tuvok but this is something between Chakotay and myself. There is one thing I need to discuss with you. Alone. The

rest of you are dismissed."

The firelight cast a soft glow around the surroundings. Most of the group had settled in for the night, making beds of moss and grass in the clean shallow caves they had found. Chakotay could not sleep and neither could Seska. Dalby and Durst and a few others joined them. B'Elanna was still awake but she sat apart from the others blending into the shadows. No one complained about the accommodations. They had all slept in worse places.

"It was stupid," He declared. Everyone else was thinking it. He needed to say the words out loud.

"It wasn't stupid. Maybe not well thought out but it wasn't your fault Chakotay," Seska said. Her voice was soothing. "We were all angry, ready to do anything. None of us took the time to think it through and who knew Tom Paris had the..."

"You would think I would have realized after what happened on Ocampo not to underestimate him," Chakotay said. "I just had our last mission still in my head. There is so much left undone back there. I needed to get back. I realize now that they can carry on without us. They can fill our ranks easily enough. Why did I think that this small group could operate Voyager on our own?"

"It was a natural reaction," B'Elanna said. Her voice was quiet. "We've been doing impossible things for so long, winning unwinnable scenarios, beating the odds. Crew a starship by ourselves? That doesn't even begin to register on the sensors compared to some of the other things we've done."

"Things that mean nothing now," Seska said quietly. "We've left it all back there."

"That's a depressing thought," Dalby said. "What do we have to live for? Our struggle, the cause, it was everything. It was in some ways my reason for living. I had nothing else in my life. I gave up everything for this."

"We live as we always have," Chakotay said. "For each other. We will mourn what we left behind and I will understand if the group no longer wishes for me to be their leader. There is one thing I know. We will build a life for ourselves here."

He hadn't meant for his little speech to be inspirational. It was at best a feeble attempt to lift their hearts. Sad eyes refused to look at him opting to stare into the firelight instead. The grieving process had begun.

Two days later he decided to take a walk to the far side of the lake to talk to the Spirits who were his constant companions. He needed to get away from the others. The conversation from the from a few nights ago still haunted him. They didn't take a formal vote but it seemed they were content to allow things remain as they were with him in charge. They were going through the motions of survival. Looking for food, building shelters but there was a depression that had settled over all of them. The enthusiasm and spark that usually fed the group was gone. After the original outrage they couldn't even summon the emotional energy to stay angry at him. That worried him.

The terrain reminded him of a preserved wilderness he had once visited on the North America east coast. It was pleasant here. There were worse places to live out their lives. He wondered if the forces that he believed in so strongly had abandoned him or had led him here for a purpose. He needed guidance. He neededâ€¦|.

He reached the bottom of a rocky outcrop and had just started to climb it when he heard a familiar whirring sound. Above him on the most prominent rock stood Kathryn Janeway.

"You came back for us?" He asked. There were no words to describe his feelings. His yet unspoken prayer had been answered.

"We never left," She said. She had chosen her position wisely. There was no way he could simply run up to where she was and overtake her. The terrain was too steep and the rocks too sharp yet she was still close enough so they could talk normally.

"We've been in orbit for the past few days trying to decide what to do. Our crew has been decimated. We cannot possibly man Voyager without your help but at the same time there are those among us who would just as soon leave you hereâ€¦|."

"You don't trust us."

"Considering you just tried to maroon us here I would say that's a fair assessment."

"I don't think that will be a problem anymore Captain. We've had time to think things out while we've been down here. We realize we acted rashly. Our desire to get home overrode our common sense. The insurrection means nothing here in the Delta Quadrant."

"We hoped that if given time you would come to that conclusion," She said. "That is why we waited." She allowed herself to smile. "I honestly don't think you would pass up the chance to explore, to do what you wanted to do when you first joined Starfleet. We have an opportunity here and we have to take advantage of it. We want to share that with you."

"You know if you had left us here, you would have passed up the opportunity to have one of the finest engineers I've ever known working on your ship?" He asked.

'And you know full well if you had left us here you would have left behind one of the best pilots in any quadrant. Either way would have been a huge mistake," She replied. "I'm sure there are many talented people among the Maquis. We'll find a place for them. Tuvok," She motioned behind her. The Vulcan appeared at her side.

"Tuvok would have been my first officer. In the interest of crew unity he is willing to step aside and allow you to have that position."

"Me? Your first officer? Serving under you?"

"Yes. You are qualified. It's the only way to make this work. You as my first officer. You bring your people with us and we will integrate them into our crew. If we are to get home this is the only way."

"You are being more generous to us than we deserve." Chakotay said.

"Generosity has little to do with it. It is the only logical thing to do." Tuvok said. Chakotay could not resist smiling as he thought of the recent turn of events. A few days ago he wanted to throttle Tuvok and here he was grateful for the Vulcan's dispassionate view of the situation.

"Go talk to your people. We'll wait here," she said. She looked around. "This is a nice place. I think that perhaps I will allow the rest of the crew a bit of shore leave. Give them the chance to enjoy some fresh air and collect themselves before we move on and perhaps get to know their new crew mates. That is if your people are agreeable, Commander."

It was strange wearing the old uniform again. It was even stranger still to see his people assembled in the cargo bay dressed like the Starfleet Crew. Many of them were clearly uncomfortable. They didn't exactly stand to attention when he walked to the front of the group but they stopped talking and all focused their attention straight at him. He noted with pleasure that the dark energy that had settled over them was gone.

"You know why we're here." He said. "Who knew when we took the Val Jean into the badlands that we would wind in this place, doing something we never could have imagined. Our circumstances have changed. We must put aside our old cause and take up a new one."

"Our fight was never with Starfleet. It was with the Cardassians. It was to preserve our homes, our futures. The Cardassians, the struggle, our homes are far away. Even if we were to take over the ship as we tried we could not possibly operate it with just the people in this room. We have to work with Starfleet. Captain Janeway has been very forgiving. She is willing to overlook our attempts to overtake the ship and offer us a ride home, not just as passengers or as prisoners but as full members of her crew." He paused to allow his words to sink in.

"Lt. Tuvok has graciously offered to step aside and allow me to be first Officer." The silence that first greeted his words was replaced with quiet murmuring. "You will be reporting to me as you always have. We will find places for all of you and for those who have no special skills or training...we will train you. There is more than enough to do."

"As your first officer I am officially issuing my first order. Regarding Lieutenant Tuvok and Tom Paris. Leave them alone. No physical or vocal abuse of any kind. Tuvok was doing his duty as a Starfleet Officer when he was with the Maquis but he allowed me to take this position in order to facilitate the blending of our crews. Tom Paris saved my life on Ocampo and I am beginning to realize that he is a better man than I thought he was and if not for him we wouldn't be given this opportunity for a second chance. If he comes to any harm I am the one you will have to answer to. Is that understood?"

His people exchanged glances back and forth but eventually they all

nodded in assent.

"You'll all be assigned quarters and duty assignments and tomorrow we will continue our journey home. We will never forget what brought us together nor will we cease to remember those who went before us but now we have other priorities and that is finding a way back to them."

At that moment the door to the cargo bay opened. Captain Janeway walked in smiling.

"Captain," he said. "May I present the new members of your crew." The two exchanged a long mutual glance.

"Thank you Commander." She said. He moved to the side to allow her to be front and center. He barely heard her words. All he could think of was the way he felt when he saw her standing on top of the rocky outcrop. She had come back for them and was willing to start over. He could not begin to guess at what lay ahead but he knew for the rest of his life whenever he looked at her he would carry that memory of shock and joy.

End
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